

D&D Fiction

Shadows of Stormreach: Chapter 3

*Eberron Fiction
by Keith Baker*



The bustling frontier city of Stormreach, a cauldron on ambition and secret plots, has grown safe and secure as the only gateway to the riches of Xen'drik. But now danger threatens!

So begins the introduction to [Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach](#). Can you discover the secret mysteries that threaten Stormreach's very existence? For that, you'll need to learn more about this city of Eberron -- continuing with this second chapter in Keith Baker's latest tale: *Shadows of Stormreach*.

In Stormreach, a secret could be more valuable than gold, and more deadly than any sword.

Spike found Link in a dark corner of the Leaky Dinghy, talking with a dwarf merchant. Joy flowed through Spike as he charged the pair – the burning thrill that only came with battle. A swift, open-handed blow with his left hand sent the dwarf tumbling to the ground. His right hand locked around Link's throat. Spike pulled his victim out of his chair, lifting him into the air.

"Hello, Link," Spike said. "My little princess would like a word with you."



A human would have been gasping for breath and clawing at Spike's fingers. Link didn't need to breathe. He was warforged, just like Spike... but where Spike was a soldier built for power and durability, Link was a scout, barely larger than Shadow. The scout knew his limitations, and he didn't struggle. Like a kitten in the teeth of its mother, he went limp in Spike's grip.

The warforged knew when to fight and when to surrender... but others weren't so wise. The dwarf that had been doing business with Link rose to his feet, his hand dropping to the knife at his belt.

Spike slammed Link's head into the dwarf's face.

The warforged scout was formed from mithral, steel, and wood. Spike might just as well have hit his enemy with an iron ingot. The merchant collapsed, blood streaming from his nose and shattered lip. Spike knelt and picked up the knife the dwarf had dropped. Spike studied the dwarf blade, admiring its weight and design. Then he remembered the scout hanging in his grip. He tapped Link's forehead with the point of the dagger, producing a

sharp ring. Spike's face was a metal mask, and he couldn't grin. Instead he tightened his grip around Link's throat, savoring the victory and anticipating the battles that lay ahead.

Spike set Link down in the chair across from Shadow. Her tutors might not have spent much time on history lessons, but they'd taught Shadow to spot incongruous details, and she noticed the blood smeared across the little scout's forehead. By now she was quite familiar with her bodyguard's love of violence, and Link himself seemed to be intact, so she chose to let it lie. *As long as he does the job, let him have his fun.*

"Link!" she said. "So good of you to drop by."

"What is this about, Shadow?"

"You tell me, doorstep. Bilge Rats. You said that I might want to find out what they were up to. When I went to do that, all I got for my trouble was a few crossbow bolts and an exciting opportunity to lose blood."

"Why did you speak to them?" The scout's voice was flat, like the grinding of a millstone, but Shadow recognized surprise.

"I see. So that wasn't part of your plan. Why don't you just tell me what you expected, Link?"

"The Bilge Rats are part of the Quickfoot Gang, and through the gang they have ties to your family. At least, that used to be true. From what I have heard, they've found a new master. I do not know who they are working for, but what I have heard concerns me. I expected you to study their activities and see that you had been betrayed and to use your own resources to destroy them."

"And why didn't you tell me this from the start?"

Link only paused for an instant, but it was long enough: Shadow could hear the wheels of thought turning. She tapped her temple with a finger, and Spike mimicked the gesture, only he used his steel fist against the side of Link's head. The clang of metal on metal rang throughout the room; if Spike hadn't been holding the scout by the throat, the force of the blow would have sent Link tumbling across the room. As it was, the blow left a dent in the side of Link's head. A few of the other patrons glanced over at their table, but the sight of the warforged soldier was enough to discourage any interference.

"Let me guess," Shadow said. "You have your own reasons for wanting to see these wharf rats destroyed, and you wanted to trick me into doing your dirty work."

Link nodded, the motion slightly off kilter.

"So why don't you tell me what this is really about?"

"I cannot."

Spike drew back for another blow, but Shadow raised a finger and he held his hand.

“Tear me apart if you must, Shadow. This is not my secret to tell, and believe me when I say you are better off without this knowledge. There is another whose interests coincide with those of your clan. But you will be helping your own if you put a stop to the actions of these rats. Do you really need anything more?”

“You tried to play me, Link,” Shadow said. She rubbed her fingertips together, trying to decide if he deserved another blow. Her father would have had the scout torn into pieces for his audacity. But he lived in Sharn, and in Stormreach a favor was far more valuable than vengeance. “You’re right. This is in both of our interests. But if you want me to do a job, tell me up front and offer me gold. My friends and I, we’ll handle this situation for you. But when I get done, then we’ll have a little talk about what you and your mysterious benefactor owe me. Do we understand each other?”

Link nodded.

“That’s it?” Spike said, one hand still wrapped around Link’s throat.

“That’s it,” Shadow said, sliding out of her chair. “You’ll get your fill of battle tonight.”

“Unlikely,” Spike said, but he released the scout.

Link watched the halfling and her guardian as they left the tavern, one hand drifting up to rub his dented head. If he’d been human, he would have smiled.

Stormreach was a city of ruins. In the distant past, Xen’drik had been a land of giants, and crumbling walls and foundations hinted at the wonders of this lost age. Over the centuries the city had been home to pirates, merchants, soldiers, and explorers, and each had built their homes amidst the shattered remnants of the past.

There was no telling how old the gray warehouse might have been, but cracks and blackened craters in the granite walls suggested that it had seen battle and fire. Perhaps it had been a pirate’s lair or the fortress of an early coin lord. Whatever its history, today it was home to the Bilge Rats.

Spike and Marcus were watching from the shadows of an alley. Spike had his greataxe in his hands, and his heartstones pulsed with light, reflecting his anticipation for the battle to come. For all that they were allies, Marcus felt a vague unease standing next to the warforged. Spike’s face was an emotionless, inhuman mask, but Marcus knew the bloodlust that lurked within. He knew that this time they were fighting for a noble cause, not simply battling for gold or treasure. But Spike didn’t fight for honor. He wasn’t trying to battle evil. He just loved to fight. Sometimes Marcus thought that the warforged was only comfortable when he was covered in blood. In the debates at Thronehold, theologians had concluded that the warforged had souls. But there were cardinals of the Silver Flame who disputed that claim, and the more time he spent around Spike, the more Marcus began to think that they might be right.

“I’ve found our entrance.”

Marcus hadn’t seen Shadow approach, but that was hardly a surprise. The halfling deserved her nickname. It was Shadow who had brought Marcus to Stormreach. The hierophant had ordered him to protect this young

woman, saying only that her fate was of great interest to both the hierophant and the church itself. Marcus had soon realized that Shadow's family was... unsavory, to say the least. Sometimes he wondered if the hierophant herself wasn't playing some sort of political game. He'd heard the rumors about corruption in the church, and now and again he wondered if he was serving as a pawn in a greater game.

But Shadow... Whatever her lineage, however she was raised, Marcus saw a potential within her. She was searching for adventure, for gold and opportunities, but Marcus could feel the embers of the Flame within her. She was not evil. And perhaps, in time – and with his guidance – she could become a true servant of the light.

Surely that was why the hierophant had sent Marcus to Sharn... that, and to destroy foul creatures like these cursed rats.

"Marcus? Are you with us?" Shadow's voice called him back.

"Yes... yes," he whispered. "My apologies. What have you learned?"

"The main entrance – the one I used before – is well guarded. But I've found another path inside. I know you think these people are monsters, but this doesn't need to be a massacre. We don't even know if all of these people are infected with this... rat-curse of yours. I want information. We go in, we find out what's going on, then we see if fighting is necessary. Fair?"

"Perhaps I should charge the front gate," Spike suggested hopefully. "It could be a valuable distraction."

"I don't want a fight, Spike," said Shadow. "I need you with me."

The warforged's eyes dimmed, but he inclined his head. "Very well," he said.

"Is Petra here?" Shadow said, studying the alleyway.

"Of course," the sorceress said, her voice seeming to drift out of empty air.

Of his four companions, Petra was the one who concerned Marcus the most. Spike was bloodthirsty, but he was ultimately driven by his desire to protect Shadow, and the little halfling had proven that she could keep the warforged under control. Petra was a mystery. She'd found the trio shortly after they'd arrived in Stormreach. She'd known exactly where to find them, she'd known their names, and through her occasional cryptic statements she'd made it clear that she knew quite a lot about each of them. With her magical talent for invisibility, she could appear anywhere at any time. And Marcus still didn't know why Petra was working with them. The sorceress said that she needed gold, and her mystical powers and knowledge had proved invaluable to them in the past. But Marcus was certain that Petra had her own agenda... secrets of her own, which might prove more sinister than any of them could imagine.

Even as he mulled over these concerns, Petra came into view, her charm of invisibility fading away as she cast another defensive spell. There was a flicker of spectral energy—ectoplasmic armor, a shield she always raised before going into battle. "Lead the way, Lady Shadow," Petra said.

"Silent, then, until I give the word," Shadow said. "Marcus, be ready."

He nodded.

Shadow led them deeper into the alley, away from the warehouse. They made their way through a labyrinth of twisting little passages, weaving between tenements and crumbling storehouses. Soon enough, Marcus could hear the sound of the tide and the harbor. A minute later, they arrived at a dead end that came to a stop at a gray stone wall. Marcus thought that Shadow had gotten lost... until he saw the corpse. A lean, pockmarked man was nestled in one corner of the alley. At a glance he appeared to be sleeping, but a second look revealed the pool of blood almost hidden beneath him... and the gap where an arrow had torn his throat out.

Shadow's work.

The man was dressed in the same black leathers as the four people who'd attacked them earlier in the night, and he still had a spiked densewood cudgel clutched in one hand. A guard, presumably. But guarding what?

Shadow held up one finger for silence. She walked over to the gray wall, calling Spike over with a sharp gesture. He took up his position behind her as she produced a few steel-and-crystal rods from a pouch. Holding a rod in each hand, she made a series of passes before the wall, and as she did, the outline of a door shimmered into view. There was no sign of a handle, and Shadow continued her motions. A faint click, and the door drifted open an inch.

Shadow allowed herself a smile as she tucked the rods back in her pouch. Turning back to the others she held up a hand in a familiar gesture—*Slow. Caution.* Marcus nodded. His morning star was a comforting weight in his hand, his shield held before him.

Shadow touched the door with a single finger, slowly pulling it open.

Spike charged.

Marcus never saw what it was that drew Spike's attack. The door opened, the warforged leaped forward—

And a gout of flame boiled out through the doorway, washing over him in a wave of terrible heat.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the ***Eberron** Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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